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“None of us can change what has happened, but we can change what happens next”

On September 8, 1989, a spinal cord and head injury from a motorcycle accident left me a dual-diagnosis paraplegic with a traumatic brain injury, in a coma for almost three weeks. I was 30 years old, recently married and our first child was on the way. I wasn't prepared for a catastrophic injury, and the days, weeks, and months that followed were a time of uncertainty and feeling of hopelessness.

After six months of living in a rehabilitation facility, I realized that we are not measured by the events that occur in our lives but how we respond to them. I re-entered college to pursue a degree in business management. I also began volunteering at Shepherd Center, which eventually led to full time employment. The experience of living with a catastrophic injury and working in a world renowned facility gave me tremendous insight on the rehabilitation process. I was able to identify and address many of the educational needs of the medical community when treating patients with spinal cord and brain injuries.

Over the last 19 years I have continued to share my experiences with survivors, caregivers, healthcare and insurance professionals with the ***Journey Back to Life Project***; a series of presentations that have entertained and inspired audiences throughout the United States. My goal is to support the restoration of life for survivors, caregivers and the professionals who have made it their life's work to assist in this recovery process. My story challenges individuals to succeed despite difficult circumstances by empowering themselves and accepting personal responsibility

NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Developed a resource card for paramedics and later healthcare professionals on spinal cord injury diagnosis and treatment.
- Developed an emergency room poster on emergent spinal cord injury diagnosis and treatment in the Emergency Room.
- Worked with the Paralyzed Veterans Administration and staff at Shepherd Center, developed a physicians manual on primary care of the spinal cord injured patient
- Worked with several companies, developed a mobile intensive care unit especially designed to transport catastrophically injured patients to Shepherd Center.
- Member of the Trauma Advisory Board for the State of Georgia.
- Past President for Professional Rehabilitation Specialists of Georgia
- Currently Marketing Chair Board Member of the Brain Injury Association of Georgia
- Created the ***Journey Back to Life Project*** www.journeybacktolife.com
- 2009-2010 Georgia State Board of Worker's Compensation Advisory Council

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION

“Journey Back to Life after a Catastrophic Injury”

After completion of this presentation the attendees should be able to:

- Better understand the effects and the recovery process of the catastrophically injured patient
- Recognize how a high quality of life can be achieved after the catastrophically injured patient returns home
- Appreciate the crucial role they play in the recovery process
- Overcome fear and self doubt
- Bring out the best both at work and at home
- Realize that dreams can be fulfilled despite one’s circumstances, whether physical or emotional
- Obtain the tools needed to replace bad habits with successful behaviors

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS:

- Medical College of Georgia “Trauma in Georgia” Conference, Augusta, GA, April 1999
- South Carolina Trauma Conference, Greenville, SC, March 2000
- Trauma Association of Georgia, First Annual Trauma Conference, Atlanta, GA February 2001
- Case Management Society of Georgia Conference in Savannah, Georgia, February 2001
- Alabama Association of Rehabilitation Professionals, Birmingham, AL April 2002
- North Carolina Industrial Commission Conference, Charlotte, NC September 2002
- 12th Annual Trauma Symposium, Mercer University and the Medical Center of Central Georgia, Macon, GA, November, 2002
- Arkansas Self-Insurers Association Self-Insured’s Spring Fling Conference, Hot Springs AR, April 2003
- Day of Trauma” Conference, Columbus Regional Healthcare System, Columbus, GA, May 2003
- North Carolina Industrial Commission 20th Annual Conference, Wild Dunes, SC September 2003
- Missouri Self Insurers Association 14th Annual Conference, Opening Keynote, St. Louis MO September 2003
- Journey of the “Neuro Trauma Patient”, Huntington, WV, October 2003
- Georgia Self Insurer’s Association 23rd Annual Conference, Opening Keynote Speaker, Young Harris, GA March 2004

- Peninsula Regional 14th Annual Trauma Conference, Opening Keynote Speaker. Ocean City, MD, September 2004
- Georgia Department of Labor's 2004 Annual Workforce Conference, Columbus, GA September 2004
- South Carolina Trauma Conference, Charleston, SC, December 2004
- Georgia Association of Rehab Nurses Spring Conference, Calloway Gardens, March 2005
- South Carolina Workers Compensation Education Association Annual Conference at Charlotte, NC, March 2007
- Georgia Workers Compensation 2007 Annual Education Conference, Uncovering the Treasures of the Workers Compensation System, Atlanta Georgia. August 2007
- Ro Medical's 4th Annual Industrial Symposium, Charlotte, NC, May 2, 2008
- Keynote Speaker for the Annual Workers Compensation Association of New Mexico Conference, Albuquerque, NM, May 13-15, 2008
- Keynote Speaker for the South Carolina Workers Compensation Education Association Annual Conference, Hilton Head, SC, October 19-22, 2008
- Journey Back to Life ABI Symposium, Savannah, GA January 28, 2009
- Journey Back to Life SCI Symposium, Macon, GA June 3, 2009
- CMSA Augusta Chapter Meeting, January 2, 2010
- CMSA Jacksonville Chapter Meeting, January 14, 2010
- In addition to presenting at these conferences I have conducted numerous in-services at trauma hospitals throughout the Southeastern United States on spinal cord injury and brain injury. I also have developed approved courses for insurance claims adjusters and case managers on various aspects of cost containment and catastrophic injury.